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AKERUE IN EREHWMOS

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Miss Low, in her most interesting paper in the February number of the Nineteenth Century, remarks that the reading of girls "should find its place in the ordinary school curriculum". Here is the grux of the situation & I happen to know of a school where this counsel of perfection has been practised for many years. Akerue is a large school situated in Erehwemös; some hundreds of scholars belong to the school, & in its several divisions, there are children of all ages, from six to seventeen. They are all brought up upon Books & Things; & I have the pleasure of doing some of the examination work connected with the scheme. I hail with joy the big boxes of papers which arrive at the close of a term's examination; but places aux enfants—why the examination of these papers is a festive employment, the children shall show for themselves. Every child young person sends many sheets; small children dictate their answers to some elder impressed for the occasion but, often enough, children of eight write their own answers.

It will be time enough to examine into the true inwardness of these papers, selected here & there ~~Id xxxxxxxx Idxs xxx lxxx/xxxx/xxxx~~ from a random heap, when the children shall have had their chance with the reader. I find that some hundreds of persons defile

before me on these triennial occasions; persons with their own likes &  
\*pronounced 'akerū & 'erēmōs

dislikes, their strong views & keen feelings.

Any middle-aged bachelor, who has known pangs of envy in reading of Lewis Carroll's, or Mr Ruskin's, or White of Selborne's, friendships with young people, might write to the Head of Akerus & solicit a share of this examination work. <sup>Should he select</sup> The Children would thus disclose themselves to him, at any rate, & like those doctors of old in Jerusalem, he would be astonished at their <sup>understanding and</sup> answers.

But I will call in a few of the children in classes 2 & 3 to show their quality. They vary in age from nine to fifteen <sup>members of</sup> & the children in both classes answer various questions in a score of 'subjects' for each of which they have a number of capital books, the best that can be had: there is not a great difference between those used in the two classes, as one of the discoveries made at Akerus is, that, the intellectual grasp of children of nine is perhaps as great as that of children in their early teens; but, of course, the younger children have less knowledge to fall back upon, & are required to do less work.

Last term they read English & French History for the years 1485-1533, with various books illustrating the period - one of them being Henry VIII. Class 2 are asked <sup>to</sup> - (a) describe the scene you liked best from Henry VIII, or (b) tell what you know of the visit of Erasmus to Sir Thomas More, or (c) what have you heard of the Begum of Bhopal's visit to the Prince & Princess of Wales? - by way of 'Composition'; while Class 3 is asked to write <sup>twelve</sup> (a) 12 lines in blank



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which arrive at the close of a term's examination; but place aux enfants, why the examination of these papers is a festive employment, the children shall show for themselves. Every child & young person sends many sheets; small children dictate their answers to some elder impressed for the occasion but, often enough, children of eight write their own.

It will be time enough to examine into the true inwardness of these papers, selected here & there from a random heap, when the children shall have had their chance with the reader. I find that hundreds of persons, fresh, unconventional, delightful, deify before me on these triennial occasions; persons with their own likes & dislikes, their strong views & keen feelings.

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But I will call in ~~the children~~ a few of the children in classes 2 & 3 to show their quality. They vary in age from nine to fifteen & the children in both classes answer various questions in a score of subjects for each of which they have a number of capital books, the best that can be had; there is not a great difference between those used in the two classes as one of the discoveries made at

Akerue is that the intellectual grasp of children of nine is perhaps as great as that of children in their early teens; but, of course, the younger children have less knowledge to fall back upon & are required to do less work.

Last term they read English & French History for the years 1485-1533 with various books illustrating the period—one of them being Henry VIIIth. Class 2 are asked to "describe the scene you liked best from Henry VIIIth, or (b) Tell what you know of the visit of Erasmus to Sir Thomas More, or (c) What have you heard of the visit of the Begum of Bopha! to the Prince & Princess of Wales?", by way of 'Composition'; while Class 3 is asked to write "(a) 12 lines in blank verse on Rembrandt's Night Watch or The Mill; or (b) A short account of Bombay's welcome to the Prince & Princess of Wales, or, some other incident of the journey; or (c) shortly, your favourite scene in Henry VIIIth". The favourite scene has been done by many children & at least a dozen scenes have been described, a fact which seems to me to speak well for the teachers, the children's minds have worked freely & no one has taught them to think that this passage or the other is especially noteworthy. Another fact that strikes this too-partial examiner is the freshness of the work as of a drawing where the effects are produced by a single colour wash. I should imagine that the Play had only been once read through by the children, a scene or two at a time. Had there been any attempt at 'getting-up' we should have had the muddy effect with which we are all familiar enough in examination papers. I happen to know as a matter of fact that there could hardly have been more than one reading, because much work in many subjects is accomplished in the morning school hours & there is no time for cramming or 'getting up'.

Also the concern of the school is so much with knowledge itself that there is not a minute to spare to learn 'about it & about it'. One is gorgious to know what it is in this or that scene which finds an individual child but that there is a genuine preference in each case is shown, I think, by the piquant way in which the scene is described.

The children in Class 3 are required "to study & describe & draw details of six reproductions of Rembrandt's work" (titles given). In the lower classes they study the same pictures but are not required to draw details.

Here are some specimens of the results from which it will be seen that the children simply look at the pictures & know every least



verse on Rembrandt's Night Watch or The Mill, or (b) a short account of Bombay's welcome to the Prince & Princess of Wales, or some other incident of the journey, or (c) <sup>describes</sup> shortly, your favourite scene in Henry VIIIth."

The favourite scene has been done by many children, & at least a dozen scenes have been described, a fact which, it seems to me, speaks well for the teachers; the children's minds have worked freely & no one has taught them to think that this passage or the other is especially noteworthy. Another fact that strikes this too-partial examiner is the freshness of the work, as of a drawing where the effects <sup>are</sup> produced by a single colour wash. I should imagine that the Play had <sup>in scenes</sup> <sup>been</sup> <sup>once</sup> read through by the children, <sup>in characters,</sup> a scene or two at a time. Had there been any attempt at 'getting-up' we should have had that muddy effect with which we are all familiar enough in examination papers.

I happen to know that, as a matter of fact, there could hardly have been more than one reading, because much work in many subjects is accomplished in morning school hours, & there is no time for cramming or 'getting-up'. Also the concern of the school is so much with knowledge <sup>itself</sup> that there is not a minute to spare to learn 'about it & about it'. One is curious to know what it is in this or that scene which finds an individual child; but that there is a genuine preference ~~shown~~ <sup>is</sup> shown. I think, by the piquant way in which ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> scene <sup>is</sup> described.



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These young people seem to <sup>an</sup> have unusual power of seeing; their observations in Natural Science, with diagrams & drawings, are very interesting. Also they hear certain musical compositions played over & over during the term & this appears to give them much pleasure. Here is an answer of a child of eight:-



Let me conclude with some of the answers on Literature of a girl ~~of~~  
~~of~~ ~~seventeen~~, adding "20 lines in blank verse on Sir Walter Raleigh"  
which comes under the heading of 'Composition'.

She has answered several questions in each of the following subjects:-  
Scripture, Composition, English History, Literature, Grammar, French,  
German, Geology, Arithmetic, European History, Geography, Biology,  
Painting & Drawing, (omitting Astronomy, Italian, Latin, Euclid &  
Algebra).



It will be seen that the work of this intelligent girl in her eighteenth year does not show a very marked advance in style & character beyond that of children ranging in age from nine to fourteen. That is true & the reason is that it is hardly possible to improve upon the understanding & answers, especially upon the style of young children who have free commerce with knowledge. Where the older scholars gain is in what they have already assimilated, in the calibre of the books they read, & the extended range of their knowledge. This, Akerue considers its grand discovery. *h*

Some of the axioms of Akerue are :-

A liberal curriculum for children of all ages above six.

Many books, owned by the children.

A single attentive reading of each chapter or passage.

No note-taking, cramming, or 'getting-up'.

Oral lessons, or lectures, like angels' visits, & never given in order to teach a subject, *such as History, Literature, etc.* but to introduce, expand or sum up.

All the reading is, as I have said, done in the hours of morning, school: much field work, handicrafts, drawing, etc.

occupy the afternoons & the evenings are free.

*will* I wonder would it be possible for other schools to adopt the methods of Akerue? It is a delightful school, & deserves, like that of Vittorino da Feltre, to be called La Giocosa.